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ABSTRACT

The structure and administration of the Paris Chamber of Commerce Examination of French language proficiency is described, and methods of classroom preparation for the examination are presented. The exam certifies French proficiency at two levels: certificat (language skills necessary to conduct business effectively in the francophone world) and diplome superieure (more thorough and extensive use of business French, and theoretical and practical knowledge in diverse fields). Universities can administer the test. Both testing levels include both written and oral tests; students can register for either test up to three times. The certificat examination has four parts: test of general knowledge; reading comprehension; correspondence skills; and translation. The diplome superieure consists of five parts: interpretation of economic data; essential business practices; response to a business letter in a specific context; translation into French; and dictation. Strategies for structuring a business French course to address the specific components of the examination are offered, including appropriate instructional materials, class activities, and exercises. Seven situations for simulation and negotiation exercises are suggested. Contains 15 references and a 17-item bibliography. (MSE)

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ED 388 070

RATIONALE AND TECHNIQUES FOR PREPARING THE PARIS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXAMINATIONS (20')

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The growth of French studies, global market trends, and a unified European market have contributed to a renewed interest in promoting fluency in business communications in French. Interdisciplinary studies combining culture and language instruction for specific purposes are in demand, proving the extent and importance of French Studies as an efficient response to corporations' needs for approaching the European market. However, seeking to market language graduates as international professionals goes beyond simple language fluency. The ability to perform efficiently in French largely depend on students' familiarity with cultural, national identity as well as with contemporary events. Although it is often difficult to judge language competency, even more business fluency, the Paris Chamber of Commerce certifies two competence levels: the lower-level *Certificat* and higher-level *Diplôme* constitute the main certification for fluency in business communications in French.

A. About the Examinations: Certificat and Diplôme

1. Registration, location, length, and degrees awarded:

Two different types of examinations promote commercial use of French. The Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry has developped over the years the French for Business and French for the Professions examinations. A new type of examination is also currently being created: French for the legal profession. I will speak mostly of methods and techniques used for preparing French for Business examinations.

These examinations grant two types of certification, the *Certificat* and the *Diplôme Supérieur*. Students can take these examinations during two sessions: summer, and winter. The summer session tends to be more popular, because students can rely on a whole academic year of preparation. The Paris Chamber of Commerce decides on the dates for the written examinations. For the summer session, it is usually early June.

The certification granted at the first level, the *Certificate* level, rewards good language skills necessary to conduct business effectively in the French speaking

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world: "de bonnes connaissances de la langue courante complétées par des notions de la langue des affaires. "

The second level is committed to a more thorough and extensive usage of Business French and a theoretical and practical knowledge in a great diversity of fields: "un usage approfondi de la langue française des affaires et une connaissance théorique et pratique des différents secteurs de l'économie et du commerce." The *Diplôme supérieur* is designed for more advanced learners wishing to use their language skills in a business context.

Universities interested in holding the Paris Chamber of Commerce examinations usually decide on one suitable examination site. If no examination site exists in the immediate vicinity, you can write the Paris Chamber of Commerce and ask permission to create a testing center. As the Chairman of these examinations, you will be responsible for distributing the required forms, collecting the registration fees and sending to Paris the completed registration forms. You must also select the jury administering the oral examinations, and organize the written and oral examinations within the strict guidelines provided by the Paris office. Sealed copies are directly mailed to you and can only be opened on the day of the examination. Once the examinations have taken place, the Chairman must return the copies so that they can be corrected in France. Later in the Fall, you will receive the list of the successful students. Degrees are directly mailed to the students later, within a month or so.

2. Written and Oral testing:

Both the *Certificat* and *Diplôme* examinations have written and oral testing. Students can take either up to three consecutives times. However, they cannot register for both *Certificat* and *Diplôme* examinations during the same session. Students qualify the written examinations with an average of 10/20. They pass the examinations by scoring an average of 10/20 for both the written and oral parts. The oral examinations are administered by a jury selected by the Chairman of the Examination Center. Oral grades obtained by students are forwarded to the Paris Chamber of Commerce in Paris which will then assess the total final score. Students can also obtain an honor mention of BIEN with an average of 14/20 and TRES BIEN with an average of 16/20.

Both the *Certificat* and *Diplôme* examinations require the creation of a jury composed of instructors from a pool of various universities. For the Diplôme, I also recommend to include officials from the French Trade Commission. This option legitimizes the examinations and also proves that students can function in a

specialized business environment. Faculty selected to the oral testing committee should be notified in advance in order to insure that no other obligations will create conflict. Backup faculty should also be available in case of unforeseen emergencies.

The *Certificat*s examination include four testing components:

TEST: (60 mn) coef. 2

The first one tests general knowledge of French applied to business and economy:

A.10 sentences to fill in with the appropriate suggested words (4)

B. 16 sentences to complete without suggested words and 3 personal examples to be provided.

C. A text to be completed with suggested words

D. Sentences to write with 3-4 words provided

E. Situation: Documents (like memo, telegram, telex) to write with a context and informations provided.

COMPREHENSION DE TEXTE: (60 mn) coef 1

This component consists of a text adapted from a newspaper article and questions relating to business or economy. Students must answer a series of questions pertaining to simple information provided. Students must choose a title for the text, identify their sources and purpose of the analysis, as well as answer specific questions on the contents. Finally, a creative part evaluates their assimilation of the information provided.

CORRESPONDANCE: (45 mn) Coef 1

This task consists in writing a simple business letter, memo or advertisement ad. Two subjects are provided. Students have to produce a letter type document with the data provided. There is a space limitation of one page.

VERSION ET THEME: (60 mn) coef 0.5

12 simple and short sentences to translate. Varying levels of speech are introduced as some can in a memo or advertisement format. Linguistic skills as well as awareness for multiple levels of speech are thus tested.

The Diplôme's examination include five testing components:

REDACTION ECONOMIQUE (90 mn) Coef 2

This component consists in the interpretation of social economical data presented in such various forms as charts, surveys, or graphs. Precise guidelines are provided in the light of which students must analyze information. Students must drawn a comparison with their native country.

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMERCIAL: (60 mn) Coef 2.5

A three-page series of twenty questions and exercises to be completed or of texts, strategies to be explained. This component pertains to essential business practices.

LETTRE D'AFFAIRES (60 mn) Coef 2.5

According to a given situation accompanied with a letter type document (generally anotated), students must produce a response, taking into account the anotations provided.

THEME: (45 mn) Coef 2

Unlike the *Certificat*, this component only tests translation from the native language to French. This one-page translation gives an appropriate idea of the extensive translation training obtained by the candidate.

DICTEE (30 à 45 mn) coef 1

A one page business text adapted from a newspaper article.

3. Sequencing of preparation:

Business French courses can be structured in many different ways. However, it is important to remember certain common imperatives. **Dictée** and **Theme** are required to be continuously taught through practical application. Extensive drilling on vocabulary with practical application in grammatical exercises will provide an essential foundation in the examination's core text. The **Lettre d'Affaires, Questionnaire Commercial** and **Rédaction Economique** represent an intensive training that can be practiced first and then reviewed intermittently throughout the semester. Translation and correspondence drill students within a variety of commercial formats, such as a memorandum, an application, a résumé, an advertisement, or a business letter. Dialogues and role-playing activities recreate

common business situations and set the grounds for a creative use of commercial essentials. These components that require intense training must be spreaded over the entire course. With frequent interactions, students learn to familiarize themselves with useful new vocabulary. Their work becomes acurate and fast. They start to encounter the organizational structures of French companies in the classroom.

Theoretical study does not work with translation. General remarks on the nature of translation and collective work on texts are helpful. Series of ready-made translated materials like those from *L'Anglais économique & commercial* by J-B Berman, M. Savio & M. Marcheteau, can be used during the entire semester and prove to a certain extent successful. But there is no doubt that customizing attention to specific problems is more beneficial to students. A major source of comparative stylistics is Vinay and Darbelnet's *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l'Anglais* (1971). The authors analyze features of both languages systems, arguing that because French tends to be dominated by nouns, it is essentially a more abstract language. Vinay and Darbelnet also point out that English tends to be more concrete and thus abounds in dynamic vocabulary.

4. Role of grammar and vocabulary:

It is assumed that students start with a reasonable working knowledge of French which can be defined as a familiarity with specific grammar points and an ability to take part in advanced conversation. Gramatically speaking, students must possess every tense, and be at ease with the subjunctive. The variety of past tenses in French poses problems for the English speaker who wants to speak and write well. Students should get more time to practice differentiating between *passé composé* and an *imparfait*, a major stumbling block for native English speakers. Use of impersonal expressions and of the infinitive is also an essential aspect of letter writing. Grammatical exercises should review vocabulary and provide an opportunity to practice vocabulary words, within a commercial context incorporating structures and forms needed in French business correspondence. Finally, when students find that certain words and expressions prove difficult because they are colloquial, they should be reminded that the vocabulary of technical fields is often easier to understand because technical French words tend to be English cognates.

5. The cultural component:

Although vocabulary seems at first to be the real key component of business mastery, the need to be familiar with contemporary events in France is important for

the *Certificat* and crucial for the *Diplôme*. Preparing students to enter the French business world also means developing their awareness for culture and current issues. Their competency in French must enable them to read newspaper articles to gather information on their own from various sources. Students can start with *Le Journal Français d'Amérique*, or Le Match de la Semaine from *Paris Match* and progress to *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro*. It is important to vary sources of information as you direct their reading interest on current issues. Dialogues and discussions on chosen articles can strengthen their research. These exercises are designed to encourage students to read foreign papers and facilitate conversational exchange. Teaching culture must be done in a challenging and stimulating way. It is a unique opportunity for students to perceive the multi-layered structure of the various political and commercial institutions. An overview of the historical framework, the political, and socio-economic aspects of French culture will broaden students's knowledge of France, preparing them for practical cultural awareness in common business practices.

The course design can follow main themes in a broad scope: les Français, the structures of France, the economy, main industries, geographical divisions, Constitution, political structures, Europe, French administration, traditional function of schools in constructing social identities and elites, *le libre-échange*, the Francophone world. A successful interaction between culture, economy and commerce will result in a larger poitical and economic outlook on the coalition of differences. Discussion on current topics provides an open-ended debate worth of further research.

B. Structuring the Business French course

1. Texts, preparation, total integration of the whole of language

Many texts exist to prepare students for using French in business. You will find them listed in the bibliography. Choice of the textbook depends on the level of the class and the amount of time available. It is important to note that few are actually based on past examination copies. For a more specific review of tested components, students may want to consult French for Business by Claude Le Goff.

Through dialogues and conversational exercises, students are encouraged to acquire skills and discover ideas and terms that are essential for rewarding careers in business. Concentration on vocabulary acquisition must incorporate questions-answers discussions. The instructor should focus on text comprehension and prepare questions to drill students' ability to read and understand fast. In order to encourage them in this difficult task, reward them for every creative and original question.

2. Informing students about cultural specificities and political-economic information

Students should know about professional magazines like *Réussir*, *L'Entreprise*, or reference sources such as the *Kompass Annuaire Industriel*, published by SNEI. In addition to these sources, students can also be informed through grammatical examples integrating vocabulary and targeting text discussions. Students can present independent work as a topic of their interest. These optional presentations complement the course content, drill students on readings and constitute a perfect help in preparing the oral examinations. Try to find real articles at their comprehension level and encourage them if they do not comprehend every thought immediately. Other materials can come through a variety of sources: articles from newspaper and magazines, advertisements, videos, interviews.

3. Course outline and testing structure

The course material must be divided in units; each one deals with a specific phase or component tested in the examination. Therefore the structure must follow what is most relevant in the examinations and especially which components have the highest coefficient (some tested elements are thus more necessary than others). Elements like the **Test** and **Translation** in the Certificat and **Rédaction Economique**, **Questionnaire Commercial**, **Lettres d'affaires**, and **Thème** weigh more heavily in the final examination score and must be instructed according to their relevance. Vocabulary must be frequently tested, along with acronyms.

The greatest difficulty in structuring the material is to cater on the one hand to students with a good knowledge of French but a limited business background, and on the other hand, to students actively engaged in international business with a more limited ability in the language. Consequently the material and the structure of the course must be organized in such a way that both groups are considered without too many compromises in either direction.

4. Integrating communication in class:

Viewing videos clarifies the language of business but also helps students internalize pronunciation sounds as well as the accompanying situation provided. Scripts for these interviews are given in the textbook and students should note that they reflect a spoken use of French. Finally, videotapes provide oral communication while retaining necessary practice in speaking and listening.

From these videos, the instructor can extract dialogues, role-playing and simulation exercises. Simulation exercises put students in real situations within a

more flexible setting. Students can imagine they are in the actual context and add their own ideas to the guidelines. The communicative approach enable them to express their ideas in a faster way in progressive steps while hearing a model demonstrated at native speed. Additional interviews with French-speaking businessmen whenever possible provide essential interaction and test for French fluency in a conversational setting whose topic and guidelines have previously been decided.

C. Using videos and business realia

Video programs exist that give students the opportunity to hear authentic language and practice pronunciation of business terms. These videos help students witness French employees and business individuals talk about different aspects of business, their jobs and reponsibilities. Students familiarize themselves with Francophone business dicussions from introduction to closing and follow-up. Through situations such as interviews and simulations, students see the natural application of learning various examination components such as vocabulary, letter writing, etc. Students see salesmen explain products performance and discuss competitivity on the market. Businessmen participate in meetings, discussing business issues, aproving decisions and entertaining business contacts over the phone. Two series are especially helpful: *Le Français des Affaires par la vidéo* by Claude Le Ninan (Didier/Hatier) et *French means business* produced by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Both are series of video programs usually consisting of between eight and twelve presentations of companies. These introductions are divided into short sequences that are particularly well suited for student's comprehension because they tend to be task oriented. *Le Français des Affaires par la vidéo* consists of interviews and simulation exercises which are reproduced in print in a textbook specially designed to help enhance students comprehension of spoken French.

1. <u>Providing direct referential tools</u>:

Referential tools can consist of newspaper articles, actual documents, pamphlet, brochures, advertisements, pictures of literary and political figures (Montaigne, Descartes, Sartre, Napoléon, etc), photographs of buildings whose importance is crucial in social life or politics (Le Sénat, les Archives nationales, l'Institut National de la Statistique, l'Institut Pasteur, la Sorbonne, la Bibliothèque Nationale, etc) which can be used and discussed in the classroom. Advanced information and documents such as maps can be purchased at the *Documentation*

Française. The visual component is essential to help students integrate French cultural identity and its myths. Major events that have shaped the French contemporary society (such as historical landmarks, decolonialization, immigration and its discontents, mai 68, etc) form an important part of the discussion.

The notion of *patrimoine culturel* emerge from photographs and can lead to a awareness of French national identity and a better understanding of the importance of education, history, and traditions in business communications.

A great variety of texts are available providing a wide array of sources and materials available. In France, a rapid extension in international business activity has prompted a lot of business documents such as balance sheet and financial statements of major companies like ALCATEL to be printed as bilingual brochures.

2. Comparative study in American and French business practices

When a country trades with another, the economic side of their relationship can't be separated from their overall relationship, which includes political, legal, military, and cultural aspects. To get an insight in French corporate culture means to show the cultural components integrated into the particular needs of the business world. This comparative study is the first level of a two part social and cultural critique.

At this level, students start by viewing videos of simulated French business pratices (such as negociation of banking loans, etc) and they compare French and American business pratices in search of differences in behaviour and questioning. It is important to introduce gradually the particularities of French society to preserve cultural appreciation for identifying problems specific to French society.

3. Communicative activities and acquisition of critical values

The purpose is to try to define conceptions of French cultural authenticity and identity uncounciously grounded in specific practices. Students must possess a growing awareness for social formulas and related cultural values. Survey "sondage" type activities can reflect opinions on various subjects and encourage a more critical use of French. Since the student performing this task has multiple options to present his research, drills on validity and consistency of research can also be included.

4. Follow-up on current events:

Exploration of the problem of everyday culture and of the particular problem in studying another culture's everyday through readings. The instructor may want to do outside readings to improve students' awareness of French current news and help

them understand and analyze the French reactions towards certain political or social situations. Once students are sensitized to international differences, the problematics of cultural critique can be studied.

D. Using simulations and role-play activities

1. Development of adaptative, critical, and interpersonal skills:

Knowing salutations and complimentary closings to business letters are essential skills that respect the formal limits set by French social interaction. Students must be aware of many social formulas, such as the scarce use of first names and understand the privilege of being invited to a colleague's house. In such an instance, it would be considered bad taste to bring a bottle of wine and it is prefered to offer chocolates or flowers.

It is important to drill list of words and expressions relating to special business cases, such as how to tempt a buyer into saying what you want him to say, how to take advantage of an objection, or how to kill two birds with one stone. Such knowledge will define students' ability to take part in social and business conversation in an efficient way.

2. Ability to analyze and synthetize political-economic information

Promoting the Paris Chamber of Commerce examinations is a complex task. A thorough grounding in French is crucial for participation in these exams. Students must be fully prepared and willing to participate in a meaningful and influential program. Courses must be drafted carefully and must delineate their objectives organized in a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Drafting these course proposals is an excellent opportunity to focus on the curriculum objectives necessary to a French business program. Support from other departments such as the International Studies and the College of Business are needed in order to publicize the examinations and help students see their rewards. By offering students the option to take a specialist-oriented examination, a special emphasis will be placed on providing students actual tools to engage in international business. Their success will mean that they can function in a foreign professional environment: write stylistically proper resumes and commercial letters, and deal with their professional environment if sent abroad.

1. Sample of goal-orientated situations, simulations and negotiation exercises

Simulation 1: A Meeting. You are in charge of organizing a meeting. Evaluate with a colleague what needs to be done. **Using Document 1**, send a telegram to another colleague who was not notified.

Student #1 asks the following questions:

1. location, time, and duration of meeting
2. number of employees attending
3. desired outcome and objectives of discussion
4. special equipment for the meeting (overhead, paper, pens, board)
5. required back-up information

Student #2 asks the following questions:

1. appropriateness of location and time of meeting
2. notification, choice of attendees
3. other objectives
4. other needs (refreshments, coffee, etc)
5. other required back-up information

Simulation 2: Identification of a company. You are a business person and meet another person at a trade show away from his/her booth. Ask your partner questions to find out what type of company he/she directs.

Student #1 asks the following questions:

1. is the company in the manufacturing or in sales and marketing
2. does it offer services
3. what size has the company
4. location and legal form of company
5. does it engage in international business
6. what is the composition of labor forces (unions, etc)

Student #2 explains the following questions:

1. type of company
2. product or services, sales volume
3. headquarters, branches, subsidiaries

4. legal form of company, responsabilities of owners
5. national or international positioning of company
6. constitution of labor, presence of unions

Simulation 3: Selling. Technical description of a machine. You are a sales assistant in a store when a customer walks in. Give a brief explanation of the functioning of your product then try to convince the customer that your product is the best on the market and the most suited to his/her wishes. Use **Document 2** to purchase the product.

Student #1 (sales rep.) states the following questions:

1. type of desired product
2. competitivity with other brands
3. reliability
4. performance
5. quality/price

Student #2 (customer) asks the following questions:

1. similar products in the top, and bottom of the line.
2. product performance
3. compatibility with other products.
4. price, terms of payment, delivery, incidentals.
5. discount available for prefered customers.

Simulation 4: A job interview. Look at the job ads displayed in **Document 3** and choose which one interests you the most. Pretend you are interviewing for the position. Your partner will play the part of your future employer.

Student #1 (job seeker) asks the following questions:

1. job responsibilities
2. job requirements (degrees, knowledge)
3 corporate culture
4. working conditions, overtime
5. benefits, vacation

6. posibilities for promotion and raise

Student #2 (employer) asks the following questions:

1. degrees obtained by candidate
2. prior work experience
3. personal qualities making you outstanding for the job
4. ultimate position desired
5. his/her career plans, motivations, salary expectations
6. references

Simulation 5: Transportation and terms of payment. You are discussing with a freight company to ship a machine.

Student #1 (cargo company) asks the following questions:

1. value of shipment
2. If marchandise has been packaged
3. If the shipment has been prepared for custom declaration
4. Discuss the delivery price
5. Discuss an insurance according to value.
6. Discuss terms of payments.

Student #2 (customer) asks the following questions.

1. Description of weight and volume of machine
2. Forecasted shipping time to destination
3. Total or partial insurance coverage and conditions
4. type of shipment
5. Estimate of shipping costs
6. Methods of payment

Simulation 6: Complaining:

A machine has just been delivered and it does not work properly.

Student # 1 (customer service manager) states the following:

1. Description of problem in detail
2. Ask if necessary adjustments have been initiated
3. Ask if it can be fixed or if it must be replaced
4. gives option to repair or replace
5. promise to send the repair crew immediately

Student #2 (customer) explains the following:

1. the problem with the machine
2. gives more detailed description of problem
3. asks the timing for repair or replacement
4. Discuss his time pressure
5. Discuss necessary reimbursement for the problem and delay caused

Simulation 7: Obtaining a commercial loan from the bank

Student #1 (banker) asks the following questions:

1. type of project requiring the loan
2. amount and duration of the loan
3. past performance of similar projects
4. financial statements of the company
5. forecasted profitability of the project

Student #2 (negociator) asks the following questions:

1. possible interest rate and loan duration
2. Start of repayment
3. lower interest rate possible if additional projects are financed
4. government subventions
5. flexible repayment plan

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